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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 002347

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV TH](#)

SUBJECT: THAILAND: THE WEEK IN POLITICS: MARCH 27 - APRIL 1, 2005

REF: BANGKOK 2257

THAI RAK THAI'S DISSATISFIED FACTIONS SET UP "WAR ROOM"

11. (SBU) Tensions within the Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party ratcheted up when members of Wang Nam Yen, Wang Nam Yom and Mod Dum Faction met for the first time at disgruntled Wang Nam Yen faction leader Sanoh Thienghong's residence on March 29. The group announced that it will set up a "Creative Group for Politics," or "War Room," from which their members will monitor the performance of TRT ministers from other factions in the cabinet. The group plans to meet every Tuesday to prepare their positions before the weekly TRT party meeting. (Note: The "war room" is reportedly the brainchild of Mr. Pramuan Ruhanaseree, TRT Party-List MP and former Deputy Interior Minister, who is close to Sanoh. He recently released a book strongly criticizing Prime Minister Thaksin's exercise of "absolute power" inside the party, which he believes could lead the party to an early breakup. End Note) This grouping of factions apparently has coalesced in an effort to counter what the members view as too much personal control over TRT by Thaksin and by his favoritism to other factions inside TRT in the awarding of cabinet posts and other jobs. These favored factions include the Wang Bua Ban, headed by Thaksin's sister Yaowapha Wongsawasdi and the Bangkok faction headed by Agriculture Minister Sudarat Keyuraphun.

INTERFACTIONAL SQUABBLES STRAIN THE TRT

12. (SBU) These recent developments reflect simmering resentments held by Sanoh and some other faction leaders over what they consider increasingly Thaksin's shabby treatment of them. The last straw was the recent cabinet makeup. Three major factions are involved in this TRT intramural discontent. They are Sanoh's Wang Nam Yen, the Wang Nam Yom (a powerful group of about 100 MPs led by Somsak Thepsuthin -- present Sports Minister and former Agriculture Minister who was replaced by Sudarat and is still smarting), and the Suchart faction (headed by Suchart Tancharoen -- who was supported for the Parliament House Speaker job by Sanoh and Somsak, but had to settle for a Deputy Speaker slot, below Thaksin's choice, Bhokin Polakul). These factions were "awarded" a only relatively small number of cabinet posts compared to Sudarat's Bangkok faction and Yaowapha's Wang Bua Ban. Observers believe that the "Creative Group for Politics" could make things difficult for the Sudarat and Wang Bua Ban members and ministers over coming months by being as eager to expose scandals and corruption as the opposition.

THAKSIN FAVORITE FIRES BACK

13. (SBU) In what looks like a response to the establishment of the "War Room," Agriculture Minister Sudarat has thrown some mud at Somsak, publicly alleging that when Somsak was Minister of Agriculture, that Ministry initiated a rural agricultural pond/well digging project that was marked by fraudulent work orders, bribery and kickbacks. Somsak has hotly denied the allegations, but the sight of two cabinet ministers fighting over corruption allegations does not bode well for TRT party unity. Members of the two factions have subsequently come out to join the public slanging match, and the open conflict could drag on for some time. Thaksin might move quickly to defuse this potentially damaging rift in the TRT. He could seek to put an end to the imbroglio by redistributing the cabinet pie, so the factional fighting could mean a cabinet reshuffle sooner than Thaksin had planned.

MEANWHILE...MORE POSITIONS ARE HANDED OUT ELSEWHERE

14. (U) On March 22, the Cabinet announced the appointment of a number of MPs and others to political posts. Some of these include:

-- General Phanlop Pinmani (TRT List 2) Deputy Director of the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) has been appointed Advisor to Defense Minister Gen. Thammarak Isarakun Na Ayutthaya. (Note: General Phanlop order the assault on the Krue Se Mosque in April 2004. End note.)

-- Group Captain Anudit Nakhonthap (TRT List 3) has been

appointed Secretary to Defense Minister Gen. Thammarak.

-- General Rattana Chaloemsaenyakon (TRT List 2) has been appointed Advisor to Deputy Foreign Minister Preecha Laohapongchana

-- Thong-lo Phonkhot (Mahasarakham TRT MP) has been appointed Advisor to Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) and Interior Minister Pol. Gen. Chidchai Vanasatidya

-- Pakon Buranapakon (Chiang Mai TRT MP) has been appointed Secretary to DPM and Interior Minister Pol. Gen. Chidchai

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-- Sucharit Patchimnan, Director General of the Provincial Administration Department, has been appointed as Permanent Secretary of the Interior Ministry.

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